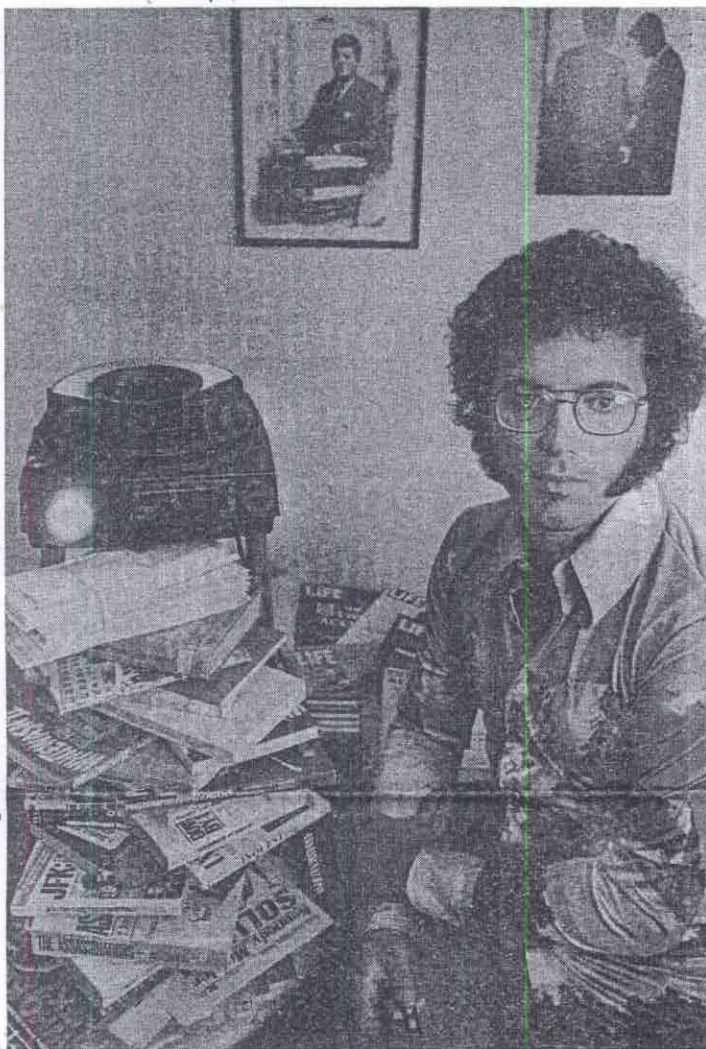


This is Mark Beiro. His hobby is collecting memorabilia of the Kennedy assassination.



By
Walt Steigleman
Photographed by
John Coffeen

Mark Beiro doesn't look like a kook. But for 10 years, the young Tampan has been obsessed.

Like most of us, Beiro remembers vividly that November 22nd, the day John Kennedy was shot down in Dallas. The day was doubly memorable for young Mark because his father, Manuel Beiro, was so shaken by the news of Kennedy's death, that he sat awake most of the night and had to be coaxed to bed. "You would have thought the death occurred in our family," Mark Beiro remembers. "He simply could not understand an American president being assassinated in an American city. I guess that's why I never let go of the Kennedy assassination."

Unlike most of us, Beiro read

the entire 888-page "Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy" (The Warren Report) when it was published in 1964. He was 12 years old at the time.

Although he didn't understand everything in the lengthy volume, he could understand the Warren Commission's final analysis: a lone gunman, probably insane, killed the President. Beiro digested the report and, like most of us who were taught that Supreme Court justices and high government officials can be trusted implicitly, felt reasonably satisfied with the findings.

"But we were betrayed," he believes now, sounding more sad than bitter. For years, he's been on a quiet, one-man crusade in Tampa

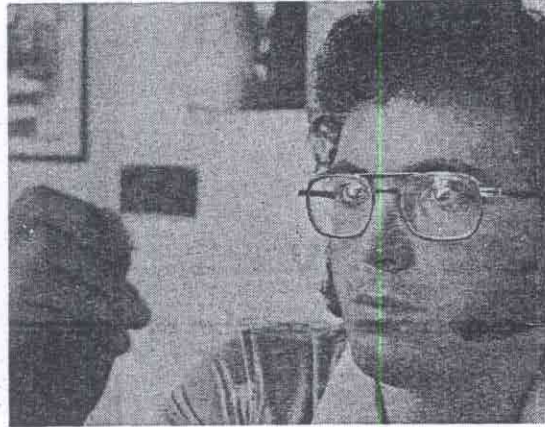
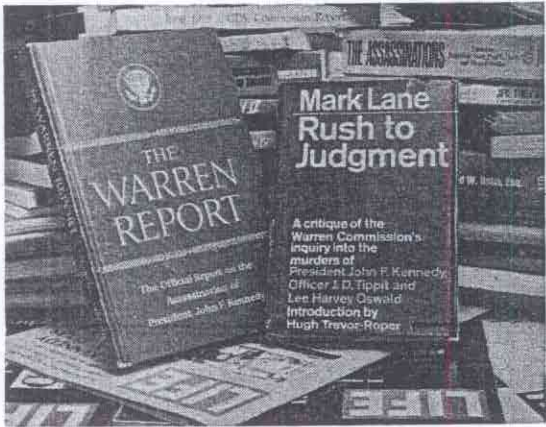
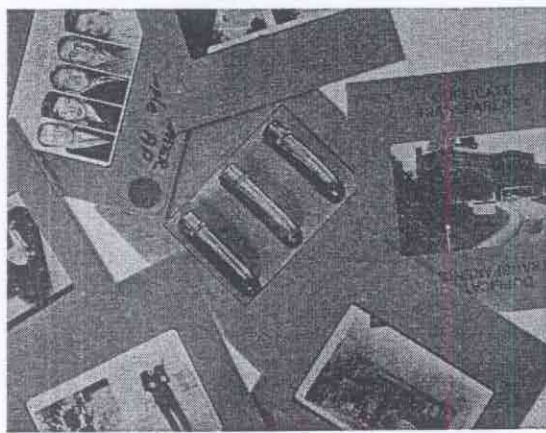
to spread the word.

Like a bizarre-looking Avon Lady, 25-year-old Beiro, who sports pork chop sideburns and a gray-flecked "Latino 'fro, packs up his Kennedy assassination-Warren Report memorabilia and traipses, by invitation only, to the homes of friends or meeting places of civic groups or church organizations to present his hour-and-a-half lectures on the "flaws, discrepancies and distortions" contained in the 1964 commission report.

On a lecture night, Beiro can be seen toting a movie projector, screen, slide projector, books, magazines, news clips, charts, slides and the now-famous Zapruder film. In the past year he's given more than 20 lectures, once

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Beiro owns duplicate slides of Warren Commission exhibits, upper left, and two copies of the famous Zapruder film of the assassination, upper right. He also has an extensive collection of other assassination-related documents, below left. That's Beiro, below right, checking out one of his slides.

to an audience of more than 400 at the University of South Florida, once to a civic group that kept him answering questions until 3 a.m.

"I must have drunk a gallon of water that night," Beiro chuckles. "They had 50 or 60 people there, and I think only two or three left."

Beiro's belief in the Warren Report was shattered in 1967 with the publication of "Rush to Judgment," authored by Mark Lane, an attorney who sought to defend Lee Harvey Oswald posthumously during the commission's hearings (the commission said Oswald did not require a defense). In his book, Lane discussed the commission's two publications: the report and a 26-volume text of the hearings on which the report was based.

Tracing the Warren Commission's conclusions back to the testimony, Lane uncovered a host of

non sequiturs. At one point, the commission said Oswald was "positively identified" by a witness who saw a man in the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository that day. But the testimony said Oswald was "NOT positively identified"; in fact, the witness apparently failed to recognize Oswald in a Dallas police lineup the day of the shooting.

"I can't tell you how I felt after reading that book," Beiro says, grim-faced. "From then on, I was involved."

Because he is presently unemployed, having been laid off about a year ago from a job with American Can Co., Beiro has more time than most people to devote to his research. His bedroom, in his parents' modest West Tampa home, is a small library. He owns books, including the Associated Press copy

of the report, on every issue in the investigation; some defend, some condemn the commission. He's collected all the relevant "Life" magazines and Tampa Tribunes with news of the investigation. He maintains a current clip file of newspaper articles. He's made a bank of cassette tape recordings that include news bulletins from Dallas, Oswald's murder, local and national talk show discussions of the Warren Report and transcripts of television programs.

Beiro owns two copies of the 28-second film shot by Abraham Zapruder, showing the assassination in explosive, shocking detail. He bought one copy of the famous film for \$20 from Penn Jones, a small-town Texas weekly newspaper editor, who has become a folk hero in JFK researcher circles. Beiro, in turn, made a copy of the copy locally. He has acquired slides, from a friend's collection, of

autopsy sketches, and he has detailed graphs and charts of Dealey Plaza, site of the assassination. He's compiled government reports, and reports by independent researchers who studied the Zapruder film and other pictures.

"I'm not really an investigator," Beiro, who would like eventually to have a career as a sports broadcaster, grinned. "But I'm a pretty good collector. It took me a lot of running around to get it all together, I can tell you."

Mark Beiro doesn't sound like a kook. His lectures are delivered in soft tones. ("I try never to let people know how bitter I am.") He doesn't come on like a fanatic crazy. But he does put on a good show.

"It's rewarding to see the people listening attentively—and they do listen. And when I'm through, they just sit there and say, 'Golly, I never knew that.' They're

always taken back."

One of his favorite indictments of the Warren Report is a set of two slides dealing with the rifle bullet recovered from a hallway at Parkland Hospital. "Oh, yes," he says, without trying to mask his cynicism. "Here we have the magic bullet, commission exhibit 399 (Beiro has exhibit numbers memorized—you get the impression he even knows commission witnesses on a first-name basis)."

Pictured on the slide are three bullets that appear to be perfect and identical, except for a tiny nick on the center bullet. "According to the Warren Commission," Beiro says, "this bullet in the center entered the back of the President's neck, exited his throat, entered Gov. John Connally's back, shattered one of his ribs, punctured his lung, emerged and smashed into his right wrist and then bounced off and lodged in the governor's thigh."

"Just look at that bullet," Beiro points, with a flourish. "It's in perfect shape except for that nick — and the FBI made the nick with a penknife in order to test the bullet in their lab. Compare that to this bullet fired into a goat's leg." The slide changes, revealing a lone, squashed bullet.

"The Commission has said three bullets were fired by Oswald, and he had only 5.6 seconds to do it," Beiro continues. "That's why they had to conclude the 'wonder bullet' did all of that damage even though it lost only two grams. If there were a fourth bullet, the Commission would have to add another assassin to its theory because it would have been impossible for Oswald to have fired another shot."

Another of Beiro's favorite exhibits is a photograph taken by Associated Press cameraman James W. Altgens, positioned in front of the motorcade. The focus is on Kennedy, who can be seen a split-second after he was struck. But the people in the background are the objects of Beiro's attention. Particularly one man, standing in the ground-floor doorway of the book depository.

The man in the doorway looks like Oswald and is apparently dressed in a dark jacket, matching Oswald's description the day of the shooting. But the Warren Commission concluded the man was another building employee, Billy N. Lovelady — even though Lovelady was wearing a vertically-striped shirt and testified he was sitting

not standing, in the doorway when the President's limousine drove by.

At this point in the lecture Beiro points out that a witness testified she saw no one going up or down the building stairs following the shooting. "And that would make it extremely difficult for Oswald to come down from the sixth floor

would be compromised."

Beiro's lecture can be unnerving; the personal research he inspires can be deeply disturbing. One little-publicized Commission exhibit, an old memo from an FBI staff assistant, contains these disquieting words: "It is my sworn statement that one Jack Rubenstein

'I don't really build a case against the Warren Commission,' he'll tell you earnestly. 'They did it themselves.'

and leave the building — unless he was on the ground floor at the time of the shooting, wouldn't it?

"More than 200 witnesses were present at the assassination site, yet the Commission only questioned 90 about where they thought the shots were coming from. And the majority of those who testified said the shots came from the grassy knoll — or some place on ground level — instead of the book depository," Beiro tells his always mesmerized audience.

"Why weren't all the available witnesses called to testify on this important point? Why didn't the Commission listen to the people who did testify?" he asks.

And he never gets an answer.

In the Dallas police station, Oswald was shown a photograph of himself; Beiro has a copy. The print, showing Oswald brandishing the assassination rifle and wearing a handgun on his hip, was a "Life" cover photo and was regarded as the main link between the assassin and the murder weapons. Oswald said the picture was a fake; his head, someone else's body. In time, he said, he could prove it was a hoax.

Now, many experts agree Oswald's head was superimposed on the picture. Oswald's chin is thin, with a cleft. The "Oswald" in the photo has a broad chin, no cleft. Another discrepancy lies in the shadows — literally. The shadow beneath Oswald's nose runs almost straight down; but the body shadow stretches out behind him. The two don't synchronize.

Beiro belly-laughs at this point in the lecture. The FBI, he explains with a grin, wanted to prove both shadows could occur that way, so they posed an agent in the same position, with a gun. In the final print, the agent's head is missing because according to the bureau photo chief, the agent's identity

of Chicago....is performing information functions for the staff of Congressman Richard Nixon, of California. It is requested that Rubenstein not be called for open testimony..."

"Rubenstein" later moved to Dallas and changed his name to Jack Ruby.

Beiro occasionally tosses out some one-liners for comic relief ("The Dallas police couldn't be all that bad—they caught Jack Ruby"). But Mark Beiro's delivery is serious and intense. By the end of each session, Beiro has established a firm, if not damning, case against the conclusions of the Warren Commission ("A convincing case of reasonable doubt," he

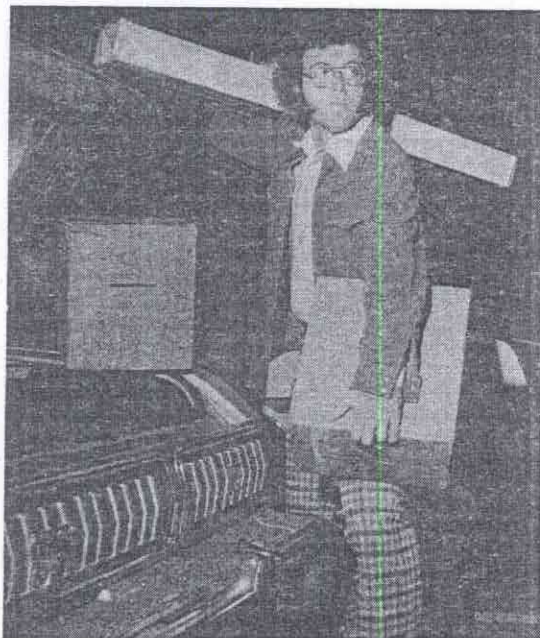
calls it).

People leave Mark Beiro's lectures hungry for more information. And that, he says, is gratifying. "We can only scratch the surface," he knows. "Most people do not know how to find information on the assassination or about the report. I simply act as a guidepost."

"I don't really build a case against the Warren Commission," he'll tell you earnestly. "They did it themselves. The Warren Commission was established to wash away any doubts. But they've compounded all the doubt and suspicion."

Mark Beiro probably is not a kook. Beiro and hundreds of other concerned "collectors" have collected signatures on petitions and have written countless letters to congressmen and senators in an effort to have the Kennedy investigation reopened. The House has already approved the new probe; and the effort has even drawn praise from the most conservative ranks of the press.

Until the new investigation clears up the mess created by the Warren Commission, Mark Beiro will continue to devote his spare hours to reading, clipping and lecturing. It's the only way he can vent his frustration: "This is one lie I just couldn't live with."



Beiro lectures on the Kennedy shooting and the Warren Commission findings to various club groups around town — here he's loading his equipment before a talk.

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*EDITORIAL ERROR: DEPOSITORY FOREMAN WILLIAM SHELLY SAID LOVELADY WAS SEATED ON THE ENTRANCE STEPS OF THE BUILDING.